

Committee on International Relations

Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats

Statement of Chairman Elton Gallegly

Islamic Extremism in Europe

April 27, 2005

Today, the Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats is holding a hearing on the growing problem of Islamic extremism in Europe.

Let me say at the outset that the title of the hearing does not in any way suggest that Islam lends itself to extremism or that most Muslims, whether they live in Europe or anywhere else in the world, support terrorism or hold extremist views toward Western society or the United States.

However, we must also face the fact that a small but growing number of people in Western Europe have joined jihadist groups. These groups pose a serious threat to the United States, U.S. interests in Europe and Europe itself.

This hearing will examine the nature and extent of this threat. I am particularly interested in assessing which European countries face the greatest threat from Islamic extremist groups, the causes of religious extremism, the ties of groups in Europe to al Qaeda and other Middle East and North African terrorist groups and the ability of these groups to carry out attacks.

I view the cooperation between the United States and Europe as one of the bright spots in the transatlantic relationship. But I believe we can and must do more, especially with respect to the sharing of intelligence on extremist groups, curtailing the travel of terrorists, and cutting off their fundraising capacity. I also support a top-down review of the visa waiver program and our border security system to make sure that the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security and the airlines are doing everything they can to prevent terrorists from entering the United States.

In this regard, last year as part of the National Intelligence Reform Act, I included several provisions that were aimed at making it more difficult for terrorists to enter the United States. Two of these provisions - expanding pre-inspection by DHS at foreign airports and placing DHS agents at foreign airports to assist airline personnel in the detection of fraudulent travel documents - were designed to stop terrorists, including those who might be coming from Europe, from even boarding flights bound for the U.S. I believe the immediate implementation of these two provisions is something our government can do right now to help keep Americans safer.

Finally, I would also like our witnesses to discuss the potential of extremist groups in Europe to obtain or develop weapons of mass destruction. Given the continued problems in securing our border with Mexico and Canada, I am concerned that dangerous weapons originating in Europe can pose a direct threat to our homeland.

I will now turn to Mr. Wexler for any opening statement he may wish to make.